



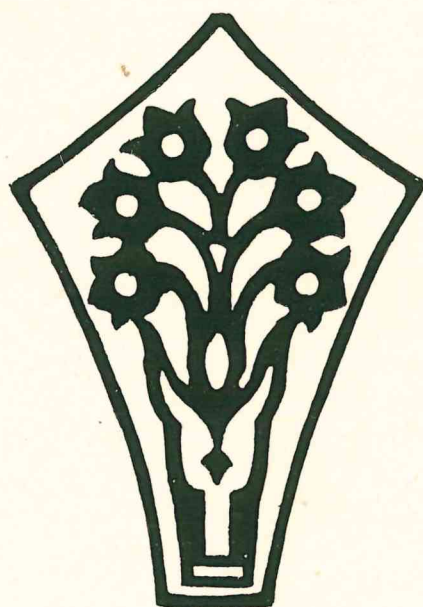
G. SALVATORI.
RUSTIC
AND
POPULAR
ART
IN
LITHUANIA



CASA EDITRICE G.E.A.
MILANO 1925.





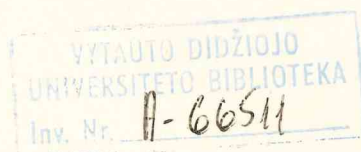


RUSTIC AND POPULAR ART IN LITHUANIA

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GIUSEPPE SALVATORI

RUSTIC
AND POPULAR ART
IN LITHUANIA



G E A
grandi edizioni artistiche
MILANO



"THE PRIESTESS", STATUE IN BRONZE.
SCULPTOR PETRUS RIMSA



WOOL STUFFS



In order better to understand certain aspects of rustic and popular art in Lithuania it seems necessary to say a few words as to the country in general, its language and the character of its inhabitants, and historic vicissitudes which the country has passed through in order to recover, since the war, its independence as a State.

The Lithuanians and their first conquests, in social and civil development.

The existence of the Lithuanians in Europe goes back to very remote times. Already in the stone age they and the Letts, whom Tacitus called "Aestorium gentes", occupied practically the same territory which they now inhabit on the shores of the Baltic and the basins of the Niemen and Dvina.

It is a vast, level territory, well watered, covered with lakes and immense forests the abundant and varied fauna which provided primitive man with game to supply the needs of his laborious and perilous existence.

The Lithuanians, urged by their nomad instincts, less fortunate in this than the other Arian tribes whose fate it was, when they emigrated, to approach the azure and sunny shores of the Mediterranean, established themselves in this northern part of Europe. Very probably, for a long time they were unaware of the vicinity of the



Baltic, since they passed the first centuries of their existence hidden in the vast and mysterious forests.

But the fertility of the earth, amply watered by rivers and frequent rains, little by little revealed even to them a source of sustenance less risky and savage than the chase. Quite early the Lithuanians devoted themselves to the pacific arts of agriculture and pastoralism.

In the thousand years preceding Christ the original inhabitants of Lithuania made some conquests which prove in them a social and civilised development which was unknown for a considerable time in the other tribes in their neighbourhood.

At the time of the journeys of Pytheas about 310 B. C. the Lithuanians had already abandoned their mud huts and caves in the heart of the forest in order to build themselves houses out in the plain, and beside the houses granaries to store the harvest.

Tacitus, speaking of the Aestes observed that not only "*frumenta ceterosque fructus patientus quam pro solita Germanorum inertia laborant sed et mare scrutantur* „. They quickly added fishing and navigation to agriculture and pastoralism.



In religion they professed the belief of the immortality of the soul. They had extreme veneration for the dead, they buried with them the most valued and precious things, and ornamented the tombs with monuments.

The archaeologists and scientists are right then, in considering the Lithuanians as a great people who early enjoyed considerable civilisation. Tischler praises the perfect workmanship of the bronze articles found in some tombs of old Prussia, then inhabited by the Lithuanian tribe of Borussians. Lissauer asserts that already in the I and II centuries the Lithuanians used knives, scissors, iron scythes, buckles, ear-rings, bronze and silver buttons, glass necklaces and other ornaments.

This high level of civilisation reached by the Lithuanians at a time when all around them their neighbours lived in almost savage conditions, made an artistic and cultural centre of their country. Finland had many bronze articles imported from Lithuania; various Finnish and Esthonian tribes have indubitable traces of Lithuanian influence on their language. According to Thomson the names of some articles in the language of these



peoples are of strict Lithuanian derivation. Niemi states that a good number of songs and considerable Lithuanian folklore are still remembered by the Fins and Esthonians and other neighbouring peoples.

Lithuanian language and its special rhythmic and sonorous character.

The Lithuanian people, of Indo-European origin, speak one of the oldest languages in the world. This language has an extraordinary resemblance to Sanskrit, Greek and Latin. It has no analogy with the languages spoken by the Slavs or the Germans. It is varied, ductile, harmonious, profoundly rhythmic. According to Fortunatoff, it resembles English in its wealth, possessing 75,000 words. Eliseo Reclus, in his "Universal Geography", says that if the worth of a nation should be judged by the beauty of its language, the Lithuanians should have first place among the nations of Europe. These are understandable enthusiasms in a student of the fibre and ability of Reclus, used to



seeking in the languages of the various peoples some animate thing which is at the same time a manifestation and revelation of the most profound and intimate essence of the spirituality of those who speak it.

Actually the character of the Lithuanians, both in language and rustic and popular art, reveals itself as pleasing, harmonious, profoundly balanced. The Lithuanian is as far from the spiritual impetuosity so often found in the Slav, as from the massive, tenacious and almost materialised volatility of the German. It rests between the two temperaments, and harmoniously fuses the two possibilities; that of intuition and dreams, and that of action and reality.

One of the most characteristic Lithuanian writers living, Vidunas, comparing the exterior characteristics of the two languages, Lithuanian and German, makes almost the same observation: "in German it is action which prevails, in Lithuanian it is the State, situation, relation. The rythm of German is almost breathlessly forced, that of Lithuania is peaceful and flowing „. Another Lithuanian writer, Salkauskas, better describes this great rythm of the Lithuanian language writing: "The details of the psyco - physiological



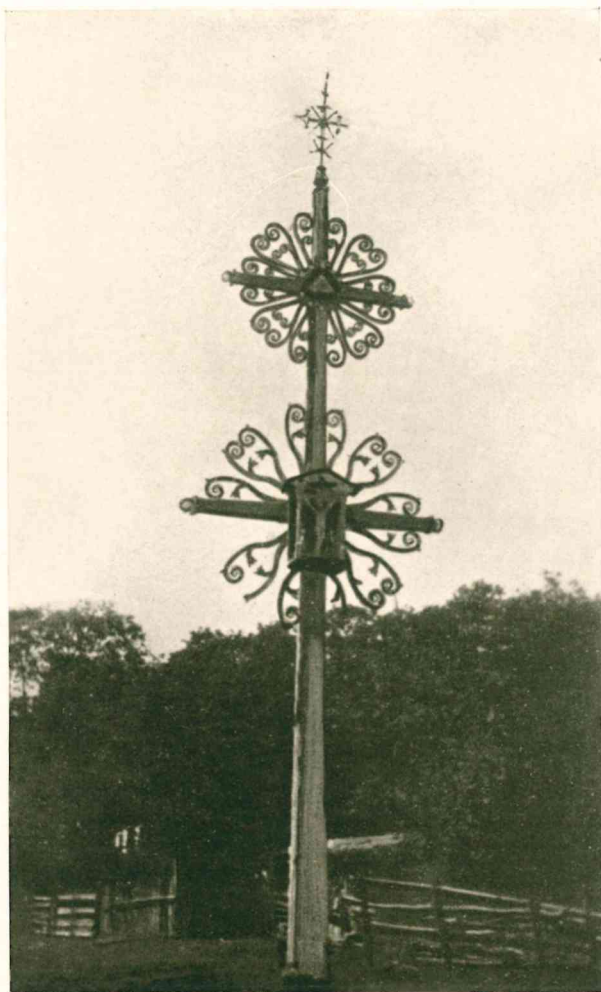
development of a people determine the special sonorous character of its language... the Lithuanian peasant is very sensitive to all the phenomena of the universe and especially to rhythm. The sentiment for rhythm is the primary basis par excellence of his psychic and physiological life; and the peculiar rhythm of the Lithuanian language is due to this (1).

Popular poetry and its special modesty.

This quiet, almost hieratic rhythm which is met in the Lithuanian language, is admirably associated with the sound of the words to give expression to delicate and refined poetical sentiments.

The great poet Adam Mickiewicz, Lithuanian too, although the conditions of life led him to write his works in Polish, was profoundly struck with the nobility and distinction with which the Lithuanians express their most intimate sentiments.

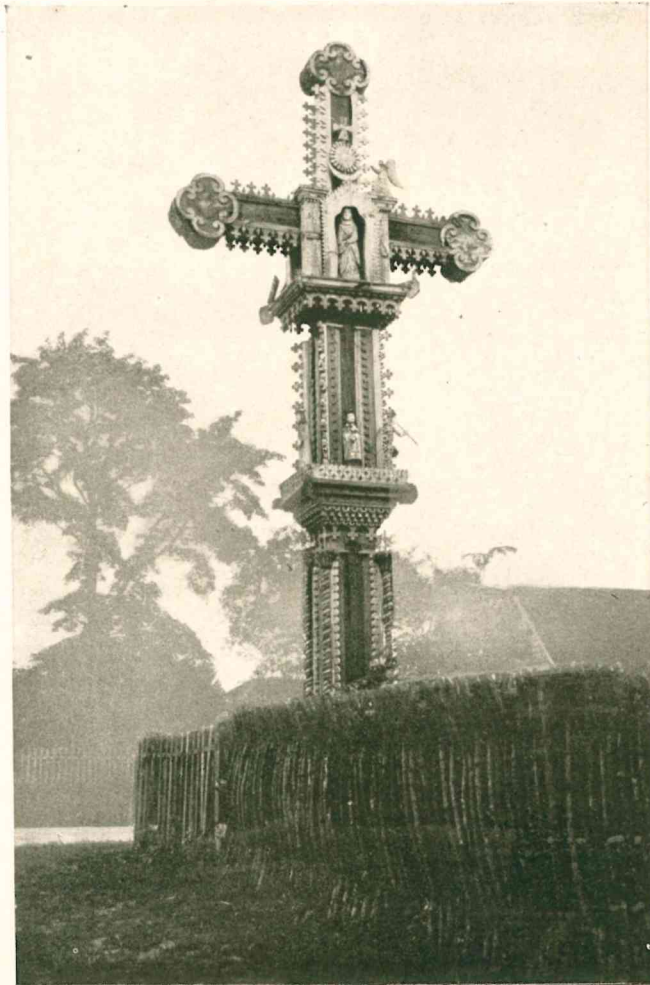
"We must note, he writes, a fact which is of great honour to the Lithuanians. In the collection of their national songs, which is very rich, there is not even one, I would not say obscene, but even a little free and licentious. Trivial and ignoble words



do not even exist in this language which has something sacred and sacerdotal in it. It rejects all too crude expression. When necessary a Lithuanians uses Slav words, which, however, a truly Lithuanian family never uses (2).

It would seem, from what we have indicated, that the Lithuanians gifted with so rich an internal patrimony, should have found themselves in the most suitable spiritual condition to create a notable national art and literature. Unhappily however, the historic vicissitudes and above all, long and continuous wars and lengthy foreign dominion arrested the development of this magnificent possibility.

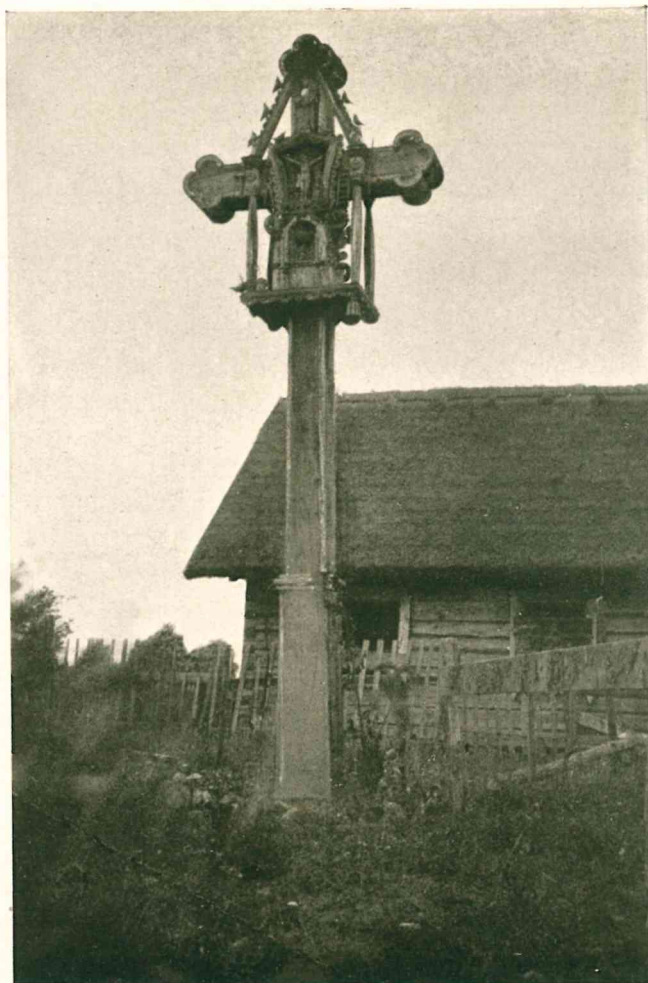
One of the principal problems of national culture which is imposed on a young rising state is that of consolidating its spiritual links with a past which was about to be definitely submerged. For about fifty years, and above all since 1904, period in which the Czarist Government finally abolished the vexatious "ukase," which forbade the use of the Lithuanian language, the younger generation attended energetically to the solving of this very important problem of its national life, and this is being carried on vigorously and with growing impulse above all now that State independence is an accomplished fact.



Rustic and popular art in the work of the painter Nicholas Ciurlionis.

A few years ago, only twenty or thirty years before the great war, when for the first time the great Lithuanian painter Nicholas Ciurlionis imposed himself on international critical consideration, in the exhibitions of Petergrad, to many Russian writers it seemed a fact up to then entirely unexpected that there should be the possibility of national Lithuanian art. On the death of Ciurlionis which occurred in 1910 Tschoudowsky wrote the following words, which today seem really prophetic:

“Now that he is dead, the authors of the spiritual revival of Lithuania present Ciurlionis as a national artist. It is not for us to judge; however his extraordinary independence of all contemporary art leads one to believe that he was really created by the hidden forces of his people; and it is well for us to be able to believe that this singular genius does not merely represent a chance caprice of fate, but is the precursor of a future sublime Lithuanian art. When I think of him, an idea imposes itself



on my mind: the Lithuanian people had no Middle Ages, perhaps it has preserved intact until the XX century, even better than we Russians, the immense energy of mystic life inherited from the Arians which our Western brothers have so prodigally squandered in their Middle Ages „.

In order to fully understand these words of the eminent Russian critic, it will be sufficient to glance at the history of the Lithuanians, pervaded as it is with a fatal and tragic destiny. We see a not very numerous race continually surrounded and assailed by formidable and bitter enemies, forced to fight for centuries, perhaps having themselves passed the predatory stage which still governed the surrounding races. This fact very probably explains the judgment given of the Lithuanians by Reclus in another part of his above named work.

“ Although the Lithuanian people were often forced to fight and it too had its great leaders, it has nevertheless preserved no record of its heroes; in its songs it celebrates no warlike undertaking, boasts of no battle won; it confines itself to weeping for the dead. In this respect perhaps Lithuania is unique amongst the European peoples „.



Special character of Lithuanian history.

Territorial conquests in the XIV and XV centuries.

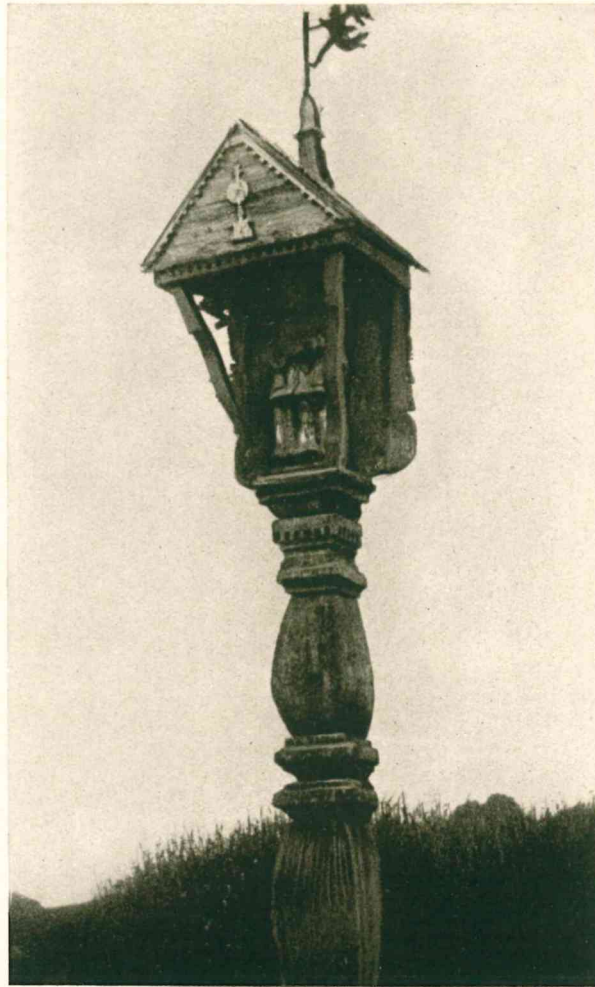
And yet the Lithuanians have proved that they can act with exceptional energy especially in critical moments of their existence. This action which in the XI and XII centuries took the form of legitimate defence against the pressure of the mongolian and tartar hords, and the neighbouring poles, was gradually transformed into a successful struggle for conquest.

The longest and most destructive war which the Lithuanians had to bear, from which they emerged victorious, but decreased in numbers and exhausted, was that against the military order of Teutonic Cavaliers. This struggle which lasted almost without interruption from the XIII to the XV century has a special importance in the history of this people which freely spent the treasures of life and strength not only on the defense of its land but to preserve its faith, which was still pagan.

In fact the Lithuanians were converted to Christianity first in the time of Mindaugas, but only a few of them and for purely political reasons of their astute ruler, who accepted



"THE PENSIVE CHRIST., STATUE IN WOOD.



the new religion and forced part of his court to do so, in order to obtain the protection of Pope Innocent IV and the royal crown. The majority of the Lithuanians however did not follow their king in his abjuration and preferred to remain faithful to their Krivules or Priests so that Mindaugas himself, in order to win back the popular favour, returned to paganism. It is thought that the Teutonic Cavaliers had him murdered for this in 1263.

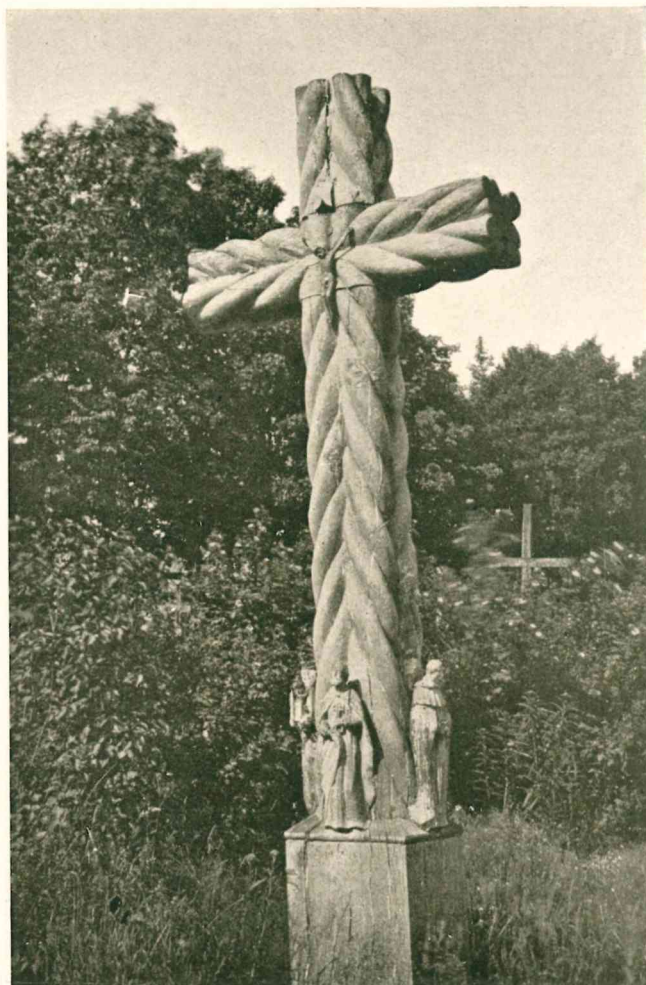
The struggle against the Teutonic Cavaliers and its national significance.

These cavaliers, so rapacious and cruel as to merit more than once the reproof and finally the excommunication of the Pope, never ceased to pursue their plan of seizing Lithuania under the pretext of converting it to Christianity. They destroyed the whole Lithuanian tribe of Borussiani, firmly established themselves at the mouth of the Niemen and the Kurlandia Gulf, squeezing the rest of Lithuania as in a vice. In this trial the heroism and solidarity of the Lithuanians for their brothers, so cruelly oppressed and



murdered, shone forth. They, who up to then had been broken into many groups under many heads, united under brave and intelligent captains such as Mindaugas, Gediminas, Algirdas, Keistutis and Vytautas and not only defeated and exhausted the pride of the Cavaliers definitely in 1410 at Grunvalden and Tannenberg, but extended their conquests extraordinarily from the Baltic to the Black Sea, so much so that the period from XIV to XV century marks the summit of Lithuanian power in Europe. King Vytautas could exclaim with legitimate pride like the successors of Tamerlane "God has prepared for us the road to dominion of the world",.

One cannot fail to marvel at these last proselites of paganism in Europe, who in the XIII, XIV and XV centuries with indomitable energy succeeded in creating a strong and independent state and in placing it as a bulwark between the Christian West and the still barbaric East, fighting against the one and the other, and finally succumbing in the struggle like those heroic cohorts to whom the general gives orders to sacrifice themselves to give time for the organisation of other forces to be thrown into the struggle. Balinski is right in his history of the famous city of Vilna: "We hardly know, and



Europe is entirely ignorant of the cavalier undertakings and political ability of a Mindaugas, a Gediminas, an Algirdas, a Keistutis, a Jogaila and a Vytautas. It is the history of a people bounded by frontiers too narrow for it, attacked by the rest of Europe for its paganism, and which succeeded in repelling unaided the tremendous mongol invasions, conquering a great part of Russia and not yielding before the rapacious order of the Teutonic Crusaders. Facts of this kind have their significance for the civilization of the world (3).

Polish-Lithuanian alliance and the beginning of the political and cultural decadence in Lithuania.

The period of greatest Lithuanian splendour is also that of the political alliance with Poland which was so fatal to the future of the country. Continual wars and continual pressure of the Teutons and Russians induced the Lithuanians to join Poland, and to be definitely converted to Christianity.



The rapidity of this conversion, made almost en masse, not prepared by any real evangelization, not consecrated by any apostolic heroism, could not fail to bear deleterious fruit in the national *development* of Lithuania. Polish evangelists who did not know the Lithuanian language, and were wholly engrossed in trying to impose Polish culture and language, began to overrun the country. Everything in the nature of native Lithuanian culture was persecuted as a relic of the abhorred paganism, and even their own language was often held up to the scorn of the neophytes as a barbarous language unacceptable to God.

The soul of the people is the custodian of the germ
of national revival.

The first to feel the influence of these captious doctrines were the Lithuanian nobles. They leant more readily towards Polish tendencies not only by instinctive imitation but also, and perhaps more, for a conservative instinct and to increase their privileges of cast, making themselves acceptable at the Warsaw court. Thus in 1569 when by the



act of the Union of Lubline the alliance between Poland and Lithuania was definitely confirmed, in the latter the national crisis had already taken firm root. The Lithuanian nobles, with few exceptions, had forsaken the language and traditions of their forebears; these however remained firmly embedded in the spirit of the people. It is in this spirit that we find the germs of the national revival: it is the people who, in the solitude of its "sodyba,, and the limitless melancholy of its wooded plains, will continue to sing its "Dainos,, to carve its Crosses and to weave its stuffs under the inspiration of its most sacred traditions and its two great loves, of family and nature. The Dainos, ornamented Crosses and embroidered stuffs are the three magnificent branches of rustic art in Lithuania.

To the very numerous and suggestive Dainos we will refer in another pamphlet, but the hints we have given will be sufficient to show the reader what a close bond of union and continuity - which is the result of the general sense of rythm which marks every manifestation of Lithuanian life - joins these three branches of popular Lithuanian art on one trunk.

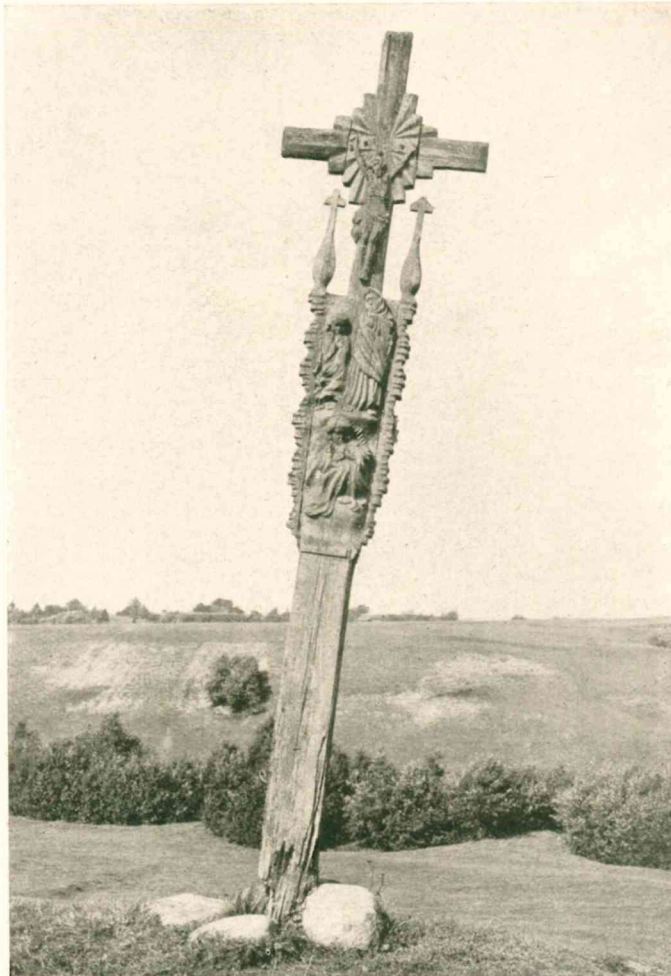


Lithuanian Crosses.

We do not intend to exaggerate the originality at all costs and the importance of the Crosses and little wooden chapels which are so much seen all over Lithuania. Similar monuments can be admired in all Christian countries, and also there are memories and traces of them among ancient peoples. Thus, not to speak of the Greek pillar, the monumental columns erected by King Assok of India and those which rise to a considerable number in the valley of the Ganges are still remembered, which, both for form and the idea inspiring them, very closely recall certain types of Lithuanian Crosses.

It is difficult to say precisely what there is in common between antique pagan monuments of this kind and the Christian crosses; but it is now generally accepted that the latter are derived from the former, and their spread in Christian countries has become increasingly diffuse on account of their consecration by the Church.

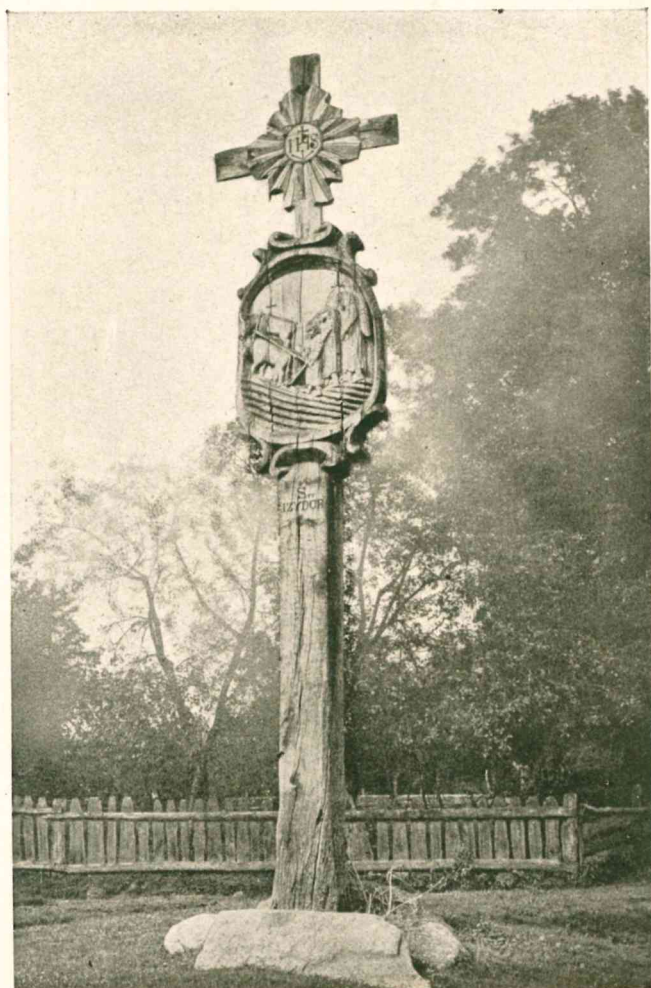
Now, one of the first conclusions at which one arrives, in observing the infinite variety of crosses existing in Lithuania and their special form or ornamentation, is, that



in this country the custom of erecting such monuments does not derive from other Christian countries, but directly from pagan times. The Lithuanian archaeologist Basanavicius dates it back to the cult which the Lithuanians had for the dead, for whom they generally constructed monuments on their tombs, usually made of wood in view of the almost entire lack of stone in those parts.

"There is not much information, wrote Basanavicius, about funeral monuments in use in Lithuania. From the chronicles however it is possible to discover that on the tombs of eminent men were erected statues. So on the tomb of the Princess Pojatos on the shore of the Zasliu Lake was erected by her son Kukovaitis a statue which the people of the neighbourhood venerated for a long time. On the tomb of Prince Kerno too, at Deltuva, was erected a statue "*honoris ejus statua lignes quae deunde divinis coere monis per plures annos culta*,"; and on the tomb of Prince Spero rose a statue to which the inhabitants of the neighbourhood long rendered honour and tendered offerings," (4).

There is nothing left now of the greater part of these wooden statues. There are still traces of some of those in stone in old Lithuanian Prussia.



It is also difficult to know what was the appearance of these statues, since with the introduction of Christianity into Lithuania, began a bitter war against all which constituted even the remotest remembrance of the old pagan cult.

The custom of erecting funeral memorials was not confined to eminent men, but also those of humble condition. In the latter case they did not erect statues, but merely the trunk of a tree roughly carved and more or less ornamented with symbolic scrawls. It is on these trunks that we find the cross appearing amongst a quantity of ornaments and symbols not altogether orthodox, so much so that in 1426 Michel Bishop of Zambie prohibited under pain of payment of three marks, the placing of crosses on the tombs of the dead: "*nulla crucem circa sepulchra mortuorum locent*„. Now it is impossible that a Bishop should have forbidden the erection of crosses on the tombs of the dead; but it is probable that the prohibition was made with the aim of eliminating the habit of using pagan symbols on such crosses.

In the collection of Lithuanian crosses made by the painter Adamas Varnas of which a certain number of types were on view at the Second International Exhibition



of Decorative Art at Monza, there are two of this type still existing in the territory of Taurages. They make a deep impression for their strange and mysterious form. Also in the south of the district of Pakalne and Tilsit are still erected crosses of a peculiar shape different from the usual Christian crosses. They are also placed at the feet of the departed instead of the head "so that the spirits in rising can lean on them more easily".

Although the people call them "krikstai", crosses these monuments are Christian only in name. From some drawings reproduced in the study made on the subject by Bazzemberg, Kursaitis, Zweck, Bottiger and Frolick it is seen that the funeral monuments on these Lithuanian tombs consisted for the most part in rough beams of oak for men, and lime or birch for women. There are the most strange and diverse ornamentations; hearts symbolical of the love which joins the living to the dead, horses heads, the animal so dear to Lithuanians and so often celebrated in the dainos, carved or painted flowers as a votive offering to the spirits of the dead; in others on the top of the trunk are birds which sing or peck each other; the song of the birds was to cheer the slumber of those who lay beneath the earth. But the most notable and impressive are those in



which is represented a human form with the feet conventionalised, and with the arms stretched out, which according to some is a first rudimentary sketch of the future pompous halo and almost a symbolisation of the solar disc.

The places where the crosses are erected too are also quite characteristic of Lithuania and this also seems to go back to the remotest antiquity. Thus the crosses placed along the road seem to be a derivation of the ancient cult for the protecting diety of travellers called "Ergutelis". There is no trace of how the ancient Lithuanians represented it, but that it existed is proved by the fact that in many districts of Lithuania the peasants still have a habit of invoking it.

The habit of placing crosses either isolated or in groups on the hills and in dangerous places also dates back to the pagan belief that in these spots for preference evil spirits lived and worked against humanity. Thus too the habit of placing a cross where a man died violently is of strictly pagan origin. The Lithuanians were convinced that the spirit remained in the neighbourhood in which it was violently separated from the body.



"St. GEORGES", SMALL STATUE IN WOOD



The form of all these crosses does not differ in Lithuania from those erected in cemeteries, but they all have a surprising variety, and wealth and originality of ornament.

Vernas, touring through Lithuanian territory which is now free, has photographed and collected a thousand, but counts on bringing his collection to more than three thousand different types. A careful examination of these types leads us to many strange facts both of an artistic and scientific nature.

Some examples seem to come direct from the ancient Greek cross, others have the appearance of votive columns. Many form real architectural constructions. Some of these crosses with their roofs to the number of two or three crowning them, sumptuously decorated with scrawls, recall to mind something which closely resembles the architecture of Indian temples. Another kind of cross again is that which thrusts upwards with the slimness of gothic construction; there are others again which show the pompousness of the baroc style.

The crosses actually of wood with little terminal crosses in wrought iron which



often, besides a scroll of metal on which is inscribed the date of construction, bear old mysterious signs, frequently indicating celestial bodies like the moon, the stars and the sun.

The solar emblem is certainly one of the dominating motives in these crosses. It may be said that the memory of the cult of fire constitutes one of the strongest aesthetic suggestions for the humble Lithuanian carpenter who is instinctively drawn even today to glorify a past to which he seems bound by an overpowering ancestral sentiment.

Actually one of the points in which the Lithuanian cross is distinguishable from the crosses of other Catholic countries is the great development which is given to the halo. Whilst in other countries this does not exist, or if it does, has generally the simple form of a circle as in the celtic crosses, in Lithuania all the power and talent of the worker is concentrated in this part of the cross in which the original form of the four arms ends by almost disappearing, covered and eclipsed by the solar rays of the aureole. There are some simple aureoles, with straight rays ending in points with the design of some flower or plant; trefoil, tulip, ear of corn, rue and so forth; others are very com-



plicated, in which a geometric motive springing from the centre of the cross is repeated in concentric rings always increasing like the blossoming of a magnificent and impossible flower. Sometimes the artisan, anxious to take advantage of the more strictly catholic symbols, uses the Crown of Thorns and places around the arms of the cross a special aureole which is also attractive. It should be noted that the Christ, who in catholic crosses occupies a predominating position, is here often so small in proportion to the general design of the composition, that it is almost lost in the size and intricacy of other ornamental developments.

The elements of this ornamentation are generally the same as those used by more advanced peoples, but their union show in the Lithuanian peasant a wealth and fertility of ideas really surprising.

For preference they use a geometrical motive which assumes the usual forms of thorn, greek design, cross, circle, curls, spirals, teeth of a saw and so on.

The conventional style strictly speaking is inspired by the vegetable kingdom. In crosses however it is not so largely developed as the geometric motive. Generally the leaves



of some plant are conventionalized or flowers that grow more abundantly in the country.

Conventionalization of animals is more rare, and is disappearing, whilst more frequent, and also going back to the remotest antiquity, is the use of bells or pendants to be found round the edges of the rain protecting roofs of the little chapels, as a motive of decoration.

Sculptural decoration of the crosses; Wooden statuettes.

One of the reasons which in our opinion confirms the conviction that in Lithuania the use of placing crosses goes back to the period prior to the introduction of christianity is that even now, in the architectural composition of the cross there often enters a decorative part eminently sculptural and established by the wooden statuettes. These statuettes, either form one whole with the trunk of the cross on which they are carved



in the form of a bas relief, or form different detached pieces arranged and grouped in the niche of the little chapel.

Since, as we have said, in a pre christian era it was customary to place statues on the tombs of the dead, we can hold that these statues which today represent sacred subjects, once represented actual idols. So true is this that among the people they have still preserved the name of "dievukai," or little gods. For that matter even in the XVIII century the Bishop of Samogizia A. Tizkiewicz wrote stigmatizing the use of placing in the crosses and chapels statues carved in forms and positions not much in accord with the catholic faith.

The importance of these statuettes of wood is certainly not comparable with that of the Crosses properly speaking. In the crosses the ample aesthetic elaboration and wealth of ornament show such a soundness in the popular artistic tradition, as to form an almost indispensable basis for further development of a decorative modern Lithuanian art which will be truly national.



We have in passing mentioned the painter Ciurlionis in whose pictures is so evident this derivation and clever union of rustic and popular art. But Ciurlionis is not the only one to apply and develop in his work the motives of this art. The welcome reappearance of these motives can be admired also in several statues by the living Rimsa, in certain pictures of Simonis, in several fine mural decorations which are in frieze in the court of the Lithuanian Parliament at Kaunas. At Monza, Varnas with originality and taste which was admired by many, has managed to extract from the stuffs and crosses which he exhibited a double decorative frieze which runs all round the two rooms of the little Lithuanian section.

What can be seen in the groups of wooden statuettes of the rough Lithuanian carvers is certainly an expressionism which, by being truly intuitive often succeeds in being more efficacious than certain modern expressionism which is too conscious and reflex. Here the means adopted by the simple workman in order to give a plastic representation nearer to his own fancy is that of frank sentiment.

These statues, tucked under the little roofs of the crosses or within the little chapels, in their grouping follow a concept of presentment sometimes ingenuous and primitive, and sometimes very dramatic, of the passion of Christ and the life of the Saints.



One of the subjects which the Lithuanian cabinetmaker carves most frequently and with evident pleasure is the figure of Christ Pensive. (Kristaus Rupintojo). It is very often encountered, now in the ordinary chapels, now in the niches attached to the great tree trunks in the woods. Christ is represented seated on a log with his face between his hands and elbows on knees in an attitude of profound and sad meditation. His expression is truly unforgettable! This Pensive Christ is perhaps one of the most original conceptions of Lithuanian rustic sculpture and points to a symbolic signification of the national contemplative and concentrated character of the Lithuanian. Does this Christ perhaps also mean, with his infinite sadness, the deep suffering of this country over which a tragic fate of solitude and discouragement has weighed for centuries!

Stuffs and materials.

If in the various kinds of Lithuanian crosses now to be seen we can admire great originality and variety, and almost a complete development of the aesthetic and decorative sense of the people; we cannot say the same of the stuffs and embroidered tissues. In this field of popular art much has been lost. For some time the Lithuanian



women have been obliged to use materials imported from abroad. But what is left even in this field too is sufficient to prove that even the ornamental motives used in weaving the stuffs in Lithuania are quite national, and have also their origin in very ancient times. It is undoubted too that in olden times the art of embroidery was in great favour with the farmers wives, and even today the various designs with which the household objects are decorated are called "Rastai,, or writings.

The ornamental motives with which Lithuanian women scrawl and decorate their aprons, ties, bags, gloves, tablecloths, waist bands, shawls and so forth are also to a great extent inspired, like those of the crosses, from geometric designs or nature, with a slight preference for the latter. For the most part they are conventionalized plants, flowers and also agricultural instruments. We have thus a whole series of embroideries to which, even now, are given special names, embroidery of fir leaves (eglike) rake (grebliukai) fern leaves (paparčiai) tulips (tulpes) and so on.

The favourite colours for such designs are dark and pale blue, but all the other colours of the rainbow are beautifully interwoven to obtain pleasing gradations and combinations.



WOOL STUFFS



Conclusion.

The necessity to condense into a few pages a very extensive subject for which there has not always been very precise evidence, in view of the special conditions in which rustic and popular art has developed in Lithuania, has forced us to adopt rather a fragmentary style. More than an exact study, this short essay has here and there the character of suggestions. We have admired at Monza for the first time, in an International Exhibition, the interesting exhibits of the painter Varnas, but passing through the rooms reserved for the little Lithuanian section we had before our eyes not only a monochord variety of funereal themes and comments on the brevity of life or the infinite sadness and vanity of earthly things, but all the profound and suggestive view of the land of the Dainos is re-lived before us, which we had traversed across and across two years before, when the triumph of a fresh summer seemed to have covered it with a flaming emerald robe. We saw again the solitary "sodyba," hidden away in the meadows and fields of rye, and the slow, dead rivers which without noise or cascades steadily, silently, wear for themselves in the plain a wide and comfortable bed before



A ROOM OF THE LITHUANIAN EXHIBIT
OF THE SECOND BI-ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF DECORATIVE ART AT MONZA

flowing into the clear sea. Everything up there has the air of seeking peace in the silent struggle for life and seek it without uproar, with a silent flow which sometimes seems like a tragic resignation. Often however, one does not know from where, from the infinite blue comes a Hurricane, and all is upset, all is dominated by the blind powers of unbridled nature. Men gather round the hearth, and travellers take refuge in the forest, and for an instant in all awakes the old terror of the god Perkunas who cast from the sky the spirits of evil: The rumble of the storm is for many Lithuanian peasants the only dramatic show at which they can assist in their long and monotonous existence. There are no large cities in this country and the steady noise of sounding workshops does not penetrate to the ears of men, changing the rhythmic sense of their lives.

We can comprehend how in this sort of continuous cosmic stupor the modest Lithuanian wood-worker has continued for centuries to set up his good and bad crosses. He has set them up all over the place according to his internal sense of piety or fear; he has planted them in the courtyard of his farms, on the consecrated ground of his churches, in the shadow of the oldest and largest trees, at the cross-roads which lead to the unknown distance, he has planted them also along the shores of the rivers and lakes; often he has planted them in large groups so that they almost rival the wilderness of tree trunks in the wood. The choice of these places, we repeat, has a remote



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significance; dangerous places beside small and fragile bridges of wood suspended over the insidious water courses where at night the peasant passing with his cart, sinks: he crosses himself reverently and goes on unharmed! The places where a man died violently and where his restless soul wanders before finding peace in the bosom of the divine; tragic places of ancient massacres of heroes; on the "piliekalniai," or mounds of earth within which, as behind fortifications, the ancient Lithuanians collected to defend themselves against the assaults of the ferocious Crusaders!

Thus all the fantastic land of Lithuania, this land so green and luxuriant in summer, so white and soft with snowey carpets in winter, seems to flower with this strange vegetation of Crosses which seem to have lost the barrenness of the material of which they are made to take on in the blue or cloudy sky an eternal expression of vitality! These crosses rise in thousands from a soil in which everything has been inexorably destroyed and buried by the voracity of time. Here where it is very rare to see a ruined castle of stone, here where the wooden houses of men are renewed every hundred hears, History has not been able, as in the countries of the Pyramids and Fori, to plant eternal signs in its passage. True it has passed this way too, with steps of steel and fire, but in the path of the great warriors have grown the forests again, the corn has been garnered again and again. Only these wooden Crosses, fallen and re-erected, rotted and renewed at the end of every century by the modest Lithuanian

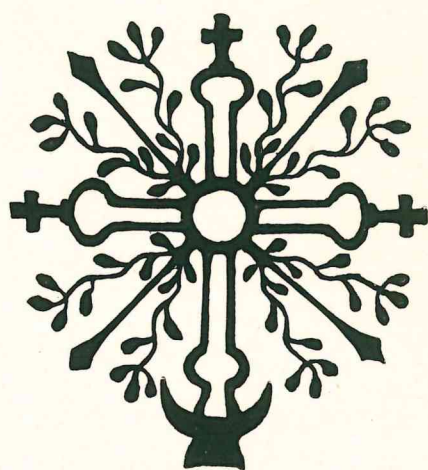


SOME VERY OLD TYPES OF CROSS-COLUMNS
TO BE MET WITH IN WESTERN LITHUANIA

cabinetmaker, have an admirable significance of the indomitable will to live of this great little people against whom it seemed that men and nature had combined to condemn them to extermination.

Here is the reason why the Cross in Lithuania is surrounded by a respect and veneration which is equalled by the respect and veneration which we have for the stumps of our columns of marble. The Cross in Lithuania is not only a sign of faith or a melancholy emblem of a hope of another world; on the contrary it is the remembrance of a greatness of life which was, and today constitutes the assertion of a liberty for which Religion and Country admirably reassume their ancient significance.

Rome, September 1925.

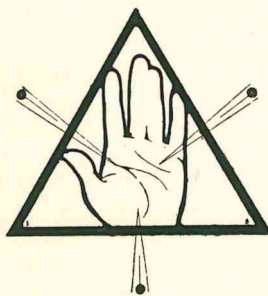


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1926

PRINTED IN ITALY
Officine Grafiche "Esperia,, - Milano
"Zincografia Milano,,

